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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003876

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SUBJECT: INTERIOR MINISTER DETAILS SUB-NATIONAL GOVERNANCE IDEAS,
SEEKS U.S. PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR KARZAI'S ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS

Classified By: CDDEA: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne; reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary: Minister of Interior Atmar welcomed intensified USG focus on sub-national governance (SNG), calling it essential to the survival of Afghanistan's central government. He criticized international contractors for knowing little about the subject, sub-national governance, and proposed the creation of a sub-national version of the US police training command (Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan (CSTC-A)) to help coordinate the assistance of aid and services at the sub-national level. Atmar called for a joint, system-wide audit and monitoring board involving Afghans and donors, but said calling it an "anti-corruption commission" would send the wrong message. The board should authorize audits of any entity receiving public funds, including Afghan Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and contractors. While supporting new anti-corruption efforts initiated by the international community, Atmar asked U.S. officials to speak out publicly when untrue corruption allegations are unfairly heaped on President Karzai, the Ministry of Interior, or its minister. End Summary.

Sub-National Governance: Develop People and Institutions

¶2. (SBU) In a December 1 meeting with Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs Wayne, Interior Minister Atmar said successful governance at the local level depends on support from officials in Kabul. Local governments should develop their own budgets and provide the bulk of public services to their constituents. However, joint monitoring and auditing was necessary, in partnership with the international community (IC), to "get mutual suspicion out of the way," which he attributed to an international view that the Afghan Government lacks interest in sub-national governance, and an Afghan belief that the IC promotes federalism over a more decentralized but still nationally-based systems.

¶3. (SBU) Atmar, who has a degree in public administration, said his government needs to train 10,000 young people to serve as the next generation of public servants. He lamented that the government did not focus on educating talented youth abroad during the past eight years. Through its provincial governors, the Afghan Government must demonstrate its honesty and competence, adding that 60 percent of provincial governors are considered satisfactory today, as opposed to 10 percent a year or so ago.

¶4. (SBU) While community development councils and provincial governments are perceived to be legitimate, they need to be mobilized and linked to the central government to unlock their power, Atmar said. He envisioned a compact in which the federal government provides security, combats narcotics, and provides political support. In return, local governments are empowered to set development priorities and combat corruption, while the IC would channel funding to locally-led development.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Wayne said the USG wants to continue the District Development Working Group program (DDWG), which currently extends to six districts across Afghanistan. Atmar responded that the program should comprise adjacent districts in the same province to lower the risk of rivalry-based sabotage by neighboring villages. Commenting

that villagers do not understand the concept of a pilot program, Atmar agreed that the pilot is also a test of how well Ministries work together, and that it has exposed gaps in Ministerial knowledge of provinces and districts.

Curb Contractor Power, Create a Sub-National CSTC-A

16. (SBU) Atmar said the IC should cease financing international contractors who "know nothing about sub-national governance." He understood the necessity of contracting large firms for infrastructure and development projects, but suggested they be rolled into a new version of the police training command (Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan CSTC-A) at the sub-national level that would work directly with the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG). A sub-national CSTC-A, he argued, could set benchmarks for local governments and could help the IDLG implement programs with assistance from current development contractors. This would also facilitate a service delivery package at the provincial level, to include public health, education, agriculture, microfinance loans and infrastructure. Ambassador Wayne pointed out that the USG is pushing international contractors to employ Afghan sub-contractors and is using smaller, more flexible contracts to attract Afghan firms.

Stand Up For Us on Corruption

17. (C) Observing that MOI had recently taken on illegal provincial road tolls and reduced them by 90 percent, Atmar noted that Nangahar Governor Shirzai is still collecting tolls illegally and that President Karzai has been slow to take action against him.

KABUL 00003876 002 OF 002

Highlighting Shirzai's good relationship with local U.S. military forces, he asked the USG to express "discreet concern" to Shirzai about the tax collectors for the Shirzai Foundation. He said Shirzai is not a bad person but is accustomed to operating as a sole governmental authority.

Anti-Corruption Commission?

18. (C) Responding to Ambassador Wayne's commendation of his anti-corruption efforts, Atmar said he still wants a joint, system-wide audit and monitoring board but is dismayed that it has been termed a "commission," which sends the wrong message. The board could commission audits of any entity receiving public funds, including Afghan Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and contractors. He suggested the board focus on the judicial system, police, provincial and district governments, the Ministry of Finance (particularly the Customs and Revenue Departments) and municipalities. These five entities comprise 80 percent of nationwide corruption, he said, and could be cleaned up in one year, if international auditors investigated them alongside Afghan counterparts. Atmar added that this would send a strong message to the American public and the U.S. Congress.

19. (C) Atmar asked for assistance in "depoliticizing" corruption, which the media "unfairly blames directly on President Karzai." Pointing out that Karzai had appointed good ministers as well as bad, and that his anticorruption efforts sometimes conflict with his aims to reconcile corrupt individuals, Atmar encouraged the USG to speak out when news reports cite untrue information about corruption within the government. In a recent incident, the British Government did not correct an untrue story about what he deems an unlawful arrest by British police on Afghan territory. He asked that the US be ready to publicly vouch for the good work of the Ministry and its Minister. Ambassador Wayne responded that the USG is prepared to express confidence in its partners, but cannot comment on unfamiliar cases, adding that he would use a public opening of a female police training facility in Jalalabad on December 5 to publicly express support for the MOI.

Comment

¶10. (C) We agree with Atmar on the need for a focused effort on getting governance out to the sub-national level. We will explore Atmar's and others ideas for improving sub-national governance. In addition, while we continue to look for opportunities to join forces with partners, as we have in the District Delivery Working Group with the British and Canadians, we are also setting up an enlarged sub-national governance unit within the Embassy to enhance our ability to work on this charter of issues.

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